

Hyde Park Historical Society Building Opens

October 26, 1980

The Grand Opening of our magnificently renovated and restored new headquarters took place, thanks to Dev Bowly's endless talent, work and sacrifice. We began with a parade down Lake Park Avenue and concluded with speeches that will live forever, assuming anyone remembered to keep notes, which I doubt.



Hyde Park Historical Society

5529 S. Lake Park Avenue
Chicago, IL 60637

773-493-1893

Open Saturdays and Sundays
from 2:00 p.m. until 4:00 p.m.

Early Board Members

Anita Anderson
Ted Anderson
Muriel Beadle
Charles Beckett
Maggie Bevacqua
Alta Blakely
Jean Block
Bea Boehm
Betty Borst
Dev Bowly
Carol Bradford
Malcolm Collier
Michael and Kathleen Conzen
Albert and Thelma Dahlberg
Betty Davey
Leon Despres
Margaret Fallers
Randi Holgate
Gary Husted
Phyllis Kelley
Emma Kemp
Gerhardt Laves
John McDermott
Vicky Ranney
Rory Shanley
Richardson Spofford
Eleanor Swift
Clyde Watkins

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(Emeritus), Alta Blakely, Devereaux
Bowly, Carol Bradford, Leon Despres
(Emeritus), Kathy Huff, Rita McCarthy,
Theresa McDermott, Gary Ossewaarde,
David Shalliol, Richardson Spofford,
Stephen A. Treffman (Emeritus), Carol
Vieth

History So Soon?



Pioneer Days of the Hyde Park Historical Society

Clyde Watkins

www.hydeparkhistory.org

History So Soon?

The Pioneer Days of the Hyde Park Historical Society

*A talk given by Clyde Watkins, a founder of the Society,
at the annual meeting, February 20, 1999*

The title of "founder" is probably undeserved, because it implies an image of some lone and far-sighted character doing things by himself. That was never the case with us – we were a typical Hyde Park committee from the start. If the organization we celebrate was indeed my idea, I must assume that others had at least considered it long before I ever did. What spurred me to action, however, was the confluence of two forces in my life.

First, in the late 1960s after I was out of college – and therefore it was too late to change my major one last time – I began to develop an interest in U. S. history, especially Chicago history, between about 1870 and 1910. Plenty of others were ahead of me in that, fortunately, and there is a lot of wonderful literature, plus many enthralling photographs, available for study.

Second, I always had a thing about that great little building. Throughout my undergraduate years at the University, whenever I would pull an "all-nighter" in yet another vain attempt to salvage some term paper – or worse yet, an entire course – I would inevitably end up around 6:00am savoring the 42 cent special at Steve's Lunch. (For that price you got two eggs, bacon, potatoes, toast and coffee!) I loved the building, and continued to fantasize about what I later learned to call "adaptive reuse." No

doubt my first notions were along the lines of a swingin' bachelor pad or the nightclub I yearned to run at that age. But as I matured, I continued to watch the building through its subsequent incarnations and its decline. I knew it was somehow associated with the great Illinois Central Station from the World's Colombian Exposition, but at that point I wasn't exactly sure how, and there was no one to tell me – or so I thought.

By 1974 the building had sunk to the level of a storage shed for the two-wheeled carts they used for delivering newspapers, and it was clearly headed for ruin. Coincidentally, Albert Tannler, assistant curator of special collections at Regenstein Library at that time, had just completed the first edition of *One in Spirit*, the pictorial history of the University, and it captivated me, primarily because of its many references to the concurrent development (or disintegration and redevelopment) of the neighborhood. And that was the moment of my epiphany. A local historical society could undertake the research and preservation of its past in context of the city of Chicago and the nation. And such an organization could house itself in my favorite structure (the true identity of which I now appreciated). Let the psycho-historians ponder which was the means and which the end, in my mind the two were linked from the start.

Here are a few dates and events that led to our eventual founding:

April/May, 1975

Tom Jensen, a U-High classmate, and I organized the first public forum to discuss the establishment of a proposed "Hyde Park-Kenwood Historical League." We met at St. Thomas Church and Len Despres was our speaker.

June 24, 1975

Several of us met at Jean Block's apartment for lunch to discuss how to get organized and moving.

March 22, 1976

Another planning meeting was hosted by Thelma Dahlberg at her home, followed by yet another in April. These meetings continued throughout the following eight months.

June 15, 1976

First meeting with Win Kennedy to discuss acquiring the building.

November 8, 1976

Jean and I called on Muriel Beadle to ask her to become our first president. She agreed on the spot and decreed that the name of the organization would be the Hyde Park Historical Society.

January 28, 1978

The Hyde Park Historical Society received its official charter as an Illinois not-for-profit corporation.

March 27, 1978

Robert and Lucille Rouse, owners of 5529 South Lake Park, finally signed the bill of sale for the property, for \$4,000

February 2, 1979

Our first lease for the land under our building was signed with the Illinois Central Gulf Railroad – five years at \$20 per year.

July 20, 1980

The "Completion Fund," our \$45,000 capital campaign to purchase and renovate the headquarters, kicked off on July 4, 1978., initiated by a "Charter Membership" drive for 100 members at \$100 each.